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ABSTRACT

In an effort to inform commuter students of services and programs on a regular basis, the University of Maine at Orono launched a campaign consisting of a newsletter and orientation sessions targeted directly at commuter students. The newsletter included topics of special interest to commuter students such as housing services, ridesharing, child care and babysitting information, and services to nontraditional students. Orientation sessions and social activities were incorporated into the current New Student Welcome program which occurs prior to each fall semester. Both the newsletter and the orientation sessions proved to be of greater benefit than had been anticipated. (DC)

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Commuter Chronicle:

An effort to enhance commuter communication in a traditional residential campus enviroment

by Joyce D. Henckler
Associate Dean of Student Affairs
University of Maine at Orono

The University of Maine at Orono was established in 1865 under the Morrill Land Grant Act. Since that time the campus population has grown from seven to approximately 11,000 students. While the first students "boarded" at the homes of local residents the concept of a primarily residential campus became strongly associated with attendance at U.M.O. In reality almost half of the student population (5,400 students) live off campus, approximately 92 percent of whom live within a twenty-mile radius.

In the fall of 1981 a campaign was launched to introduce commuter students on a regular basis to existing services and expanding program offerings. The **Commuter Chronicle**, the first regular newsletter to commuter students was produced and mailed bulk rate to all commuters. The Office of the Dean of Student Affairs was responsible for the editing and production of the paper which contained information on: Off Campus Housing Service, Ridesharing, Spouse Activity Card Program, Child Care Information, Babysitting Service, Family Movies, Noontime Programs in the Memorial Union, Services to Non-Traditional Students and Discount Theatre Tickets (which are made available to new students).

The spring semester edition included information about: Student Success Series; The New Coordinator of Non-Traditional Student Services; A Message Service For Commuters, Learning Resources Brokerage; Recreational Activities; Upcoming Campus Events and Mini Courses in Career Skills. Response to the **Commuter Chronicle** was overwhelming. The lively format, punctuated by illustrations from the Graphics Department on campus, combined to provide a highly readable publication which was read, discussed and commented upon by students who indicated that they traditionally did not read much of their mail. An additional publication, **NETWORK** for non-traditional students was produced during the spring semester and forwarded to the approximately 2,000 students who are 24 years of age or older.

OUTCOMES—

As a result of these simple publications we experienced an upsurge in "Commuter consciousness." A greater number of off campus students came to the office to avail themselves of services and activities that were promoted in the publications. A number of other campus offices contacted the editors and asked that information about their activities be included in future editions.

FOR THE FUTURE—

As an adjunct to the expanding communication effort, it was felt that greater inroads could be made with new commuter students if we personalized elements of the New Student Welcome program which occurs just prior to the opening of school in the fall. In early August, a reminder listing the major events for New Student Welcome was mailed to all new students. Special mention was made of the opening reception for commuters. This was the first time that an opening reception of this type was designed specifically for commuter students. On the second day of New Student Welcome a commuter continental breakfast was held prior to the orientation activities. At noon a "make your own sundae" ice cream "social" attracted another portion of the off campus population. In addition, campus survival skills sessions which were one half hour in length and covered fifteen different topics, including: Budgeting Your Funds To Last The School Year; Communicating with Your Academic Advisor; How To Survive as a Student When You are Also a Parent; Living Better for Less; Notetaking for Results; Time Management; and the Non-Traditional Student Network had double the number of attendees as in the previous year. It was obvious that these efforts to inform commuters of opening activities combined with the special highlighting of commuter oriented events with a "C" designation in the New Student Welcome Program Schedule reaped greater benefits than we had anticipated.

Copies of the **U.M.O. Commuter Chronicle** and the **New Student Welcome Program** brochure are available by contacting: Joyce D. Henckler, Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Memorial Union, University of Maine at Orono, Orono, ME 04469.

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